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UNCLAS MUSCAT 000206

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARPI (TROBERTS), NEA/PPD (CWHITTLESEY), NEA/P
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LONDON FOR GOLDRICH
PARIS FOR ZEYA
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SUBJECT: MUSCAT SPECIAL MEDIA REACTION: RESPONSE TO PRESIDENTIAL
STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. Arabic and English language print media in Oman gave extensive coverage to President Bush's State Of The Union Address, particularly the sections of the speech relating to Iraq and the Middle East Peace Process. Most coverage focused on his warnings to Iran and Syria. Many articles were critical of the Administration's focus on reform in the Middle East. However, at least one article specifically hailed the President's call for an independent Palestinian state. End Summary.

An Empire Speaks

[1](#)2. On February 4, privately-owned Arabic daily "Al-Watan" carried an editorial entitled, "Policy of a Great Empire":

"The influence of the United States stretches to all parts of the world. Thus, foreign policy took a prominent role in President Bush's State of the Union Address to the U.S. Congress. In addition to discussing domestic issues, the speech addressed the U.S. position on the war on terror, democratic reform, freedom, and human rights. A large percentage of the speech was also dedicated to the situation in Iraq, the U.S. position on Iran and the Middle East Peace Process. The speech was well delivered; however, there were clear inconsistencies between what Bush said and reality. His remarks called for freedom and democracy. However, in the case of Palestinians, the U.S. sees their freedom as secondary to the desires of Israel. America applauds itself for ousting Saddam Hussein from power. However, in Latin America and other countries in the world, the U.S. has systematically supported dictatorships that have had no respect for democracy or human rights. America calls for the Iraqi people to take charge of their own future. However, it openly interferes in Iran's internal policies. The reality is that under the Bush Administration, the whole world falls under U.S. policy. The real test for America is whether it will accept new democracies that have views different from its own."

Words of War

[1](#)3. On February 4, the privately-owned Arabic daily "Al-Watan" published an editorial entitled, "The American Speech of War":

"President Bush's State Of The Union Address clearly indicates his view of what the Arab and Islamic world will look like in the future. It also hinted at the wars that the U.S. will launch to achieve these changes. What was missing was a clear statement that Syria and Iran will be the next targets of the American military... America is not afraid to launch wars because it knows that its superior military will win easily."

Time For Change

[1](#)4. The government-owned Arabic daily "Oman" carried an editorial reported by the Gulf Center for Strategic Studies on February 4 under the title "Bush Speech and Signs of Change In the American Position":

"The American President's speech gave an overview of U.S. foreign policy objectives, particularly in relation to democratic reform in this region. The focus on reform could be good for the Palestinians because it may mean that the U.S. Administration will support a free and independent Palestinian state not only through words, but through deeds. The U.S. may even oblige Israel to do the same. This is a clear shift from historical policy regarding Palestine. Nevertheless, the speech provoked a lot of controversy because of its talk of war."

BALTIMORE